

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07

LAB-04 SIL-01 AID-05 CU-02 DHA-02 SCCT-01 AS-01 /080 W

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R 181300Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8008

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

DIA WASHDC

USSOUTHCOM QUARRY HEIGHTS

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 8388

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EC

SUBJECT: THE GOE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GENERAL STRIKE

REF: A) QUITO 8298 B) QUITO 8302 C) QUITO 8304

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE RODRIGUEZ LARA GOVERNMENT EMERGED FROM THE NOV. 13 NATIONWIDE GENERAL STRIKE WITH LITTLE OR NO DAMAGE AND POSSIBLY STRENGTHENED. THE STRIKE'S STATED PURPOSE WAS TO PUBLICIZE WORKER DEMANDS FOR HIGHER WAGES, BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS, ARE--DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH, AND OTHER ASSORTED DESIDERATA. IT SUCCEEDED, AT LEAST IN THE SENSE THAT THE 12-HOUR SHUTDOWN WAS VIRTUALLY COMPLETE. THERE WAS NO SERIOUS VIOLENCE, AND THE GOE WAS OBVIOUSLY IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. THE STRIKE LEADERS SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIMED ANY POLITICAL OBJECTIVES, BUT A NUMBER OF POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES TRIED TO HITCH THEMSELVES TO THE STRIKE'S BANDWAGON WITH MINIMAL OR NO SUCCESS. POLITICAL (CHIEFLY VERBAL) PRESSURES AGAINST THE RODRIGUEZ LARA GOVERNMENT CONTINUE, BUT THUS FAR THE GOVERNMENT HAS DEALT WITH THEM SUCCESSFULLY, AND
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IN AN EVEN-HANDED MANNER. END SUMMARY.

2. THE 12-HOUR NATIONWIDE GENERAL STRIKE, CALLED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF THE THREE MOST PROMINENT ECUADOREAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATIONS ON NOV. 13TH, WAS LARGELY SUCCESSFUL. MOST PUBLIC TRANSPORT (TRUCKS AND BUSES) DID NOT OPERATE, AND MOST WORKERS STAYED OFF THEIR JOBS. WORKERS DID NOT, HOWEVER, SHUT DOWN ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES (WATER, POWER, TELEPHONES), AND AIRPORTS AND LAND FRONTIERS REMAINED OPEN. THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT EVEN DECLARE A CURFEW. SCATTERED ACTS OF VIOLENCE OCCURRED, MAINLY CONSISTING OF CLASHES BETWEEN SMALL NUMBERS OF RADICAL STUDENTS AND POLICE IN QUITO, GUAYAQUIL, AND OTHER MAJOR CITIES. THE STRIKE WAS CALLED FOR LABOR REASONS, NOT POLITICAL ONES, AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS NEITHER DIRECTLY THREATENED, NOR DID IT ALLOW MATTERS TO SLIP OUT OF CONTROL. A HANDFUL OF STUDENTS WAS ARRESTED, BUT THERE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN NO WIDESPREAD VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL OR HUMAN RIGHTS.

3. POLITICAL PRESSURES, MOSTLY IN THE FORM OF STATEMENTS FROM POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES, SECONDARILY FROM NEWSPAPERS AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, HAD BEEN BUILDING FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. RUMORS, ECUADOR'S MOST NOTABLE NATIONAL PRODUCT, FLOWED IN ABUNDANCE: AMONG THEM, THAT RODRIGUEZ HAD FLOWN HIS FAMILY OUT OF THE COUNTRY; THAT RODRIGUEZ WAS DESPERATELY NEGOTIATING WITH MILITARY COMMANDERS FOR SUPPORT; THAT MILITARY FORCES IN EL ORO PROVINCE (ALONG THE PERUVIAN BORDER) WERE IN REVOLT; THAT THE RULING MILITARY GROUP WAS ABOUT TO SHOVE RODRIGUEZ ASIDE IN FAVOR OF ADM. POVEDA (OR GEN. DURAN; OR GEN. SEMBLANTES; OR GEN. RUBEN DARIO AYALA); AND SO ON. ALL PROVED FALSE.

4. ON NOV. 8TH, JULIO CESAR TRUJILLO, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WAS ARRESTED IN QUITO, AND ON NOV. 9TH, FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA WAS ARRESTED IN GUAYAQUIL AS HE GOT OFF A PLANE FROM BOGOTA. MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT GEN. AYALA SAID BOTH MEN "WERE DETAINED FOR SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES, WITH THE ADDED AGGRAVATION THAT THESE OCCURRED NOT ONLY INSIDE THE COUNTRY, BUT OUTSIDE AS WELL." AROSEMENA AND TRUJILLO WERE FLOWN TO EXILE IN LA PAZ BY AN ECUADOREAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT ON

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NOV. 12TH, CONTINUING THIS GOVERNMENT'S PRACTICE OF DEPORTING ITS MOST DANGEROUS POLITICAL OPPONENTS, RATHER THAN JAILING THEM.

5. PREDICTABLY, THE DEPORTATIONS (WHICH RAISED TO FOURTEEN THE NUMBER OF EXILES SINCE THE ABORTIVE SEPT. 1 COUP ATTEMPT) HAVE LED TO NEW DENUNCIATIONS FROM MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES (ESPECIALLY THOSE WHOSE LEADERS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED

OR DEPORTED.) TWO OF THE COUNTRY'S MOST PROMINENT ELDER STATESMEN BROKE THEIR SILENCE AND SPOKE OUT AGAINST THE RODRIGUEZ LARA GOVERNMENT. FORMER PRESIDENT OTTO AROSEMENA, IN A WIDELY PUBLICIZED NOV. 11 LETTER TO PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ, CRITICIZED THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT FOR WASTING THE COUNTRY'S RESOURCES AND IMPRISONING AND EXILING ITS POLITICAL LEADERS, AND CALLED FOR THE IMMEDIATE HANDING OF POWER TO A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT. FORMER PRESIDENT CAMILO PONCE HARSHLY CRITICIZED THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT FOR ITS DISTORTIONS OF TRUTH IN ALLEGING THAT THE ARRESTED POLITICAL LEADERS WERE TRAITORS SEEKING TO RETURN POWER TO THE OLIGARCHS. PONCE, TOO, CALLED FOR THE IMMEDIATE TURN-OVER OF POWER TO A CIVIL GOVERNMENT. LIKEWISE, THE LIBERAL PARTY, ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S STRONGEST, HAS COME OUT FOR IMMEDIATE RETURN TO CIVIL RULE, POSSIBLY USING A JOINT MILITARY-CIVILIAN TRANSITION GOVERNMENT PENDING ELECTIONS.

6. CARLOS JULIO AROSEMENA'S NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY PARTY ATTEMPTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NATIONWIDE GENERAL STRIKE BY CALLING, ON ITS EVE, FOR "CIVIL RESISTANCE." BUT THERE WAS NO SUCH ACTION, AND THE LABOR LEADERSHIP DECLINED TO GET DRAGGED INTO POLITICAL SQUABBLES, INSISTING THAT THE STRIKE WAS CALLED FOR LEGITIMATE LABOR REASONS, NOT AS PART OF AN EFFORT TO THREATEN THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT.

7. THE RISING DECIBEL LEVEL FROM POLITICAL PARTIES HAS BEEN JOINED BY THE NEWSPAPERS, PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF WHICH WAS QUITO'S EL COMERCIO, USUALLY RATHER TAME, AND OCCASIONALLY EVEN A SURROGATE MOUTHPIECE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. IN ITS LEAD EDITORIAL ON NOV. 12TH, COMERCIO SAID "THE GOVERNMENT MUST LOOK FOR THE CAUSES OF THE PREVAILING ANXIETY. THE PRINCIPAL REASON HAS BEEN . . . ITS INSISTENCE THAT ALTHOUGH IT SAYS IT DOES

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NOT WISH TO PERPETUATE ITS RULE, IT HAS FAILED TO ANNOUNCE ITS PLAN FOR A TRANSFER OF POWER. WE BELIEVE THE MOST SERIOUS ERROR THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE HAS BEEN TO BELIEVE THAT IT MUST STAY IN POWER INDEFINITELY." COMERCIO WENT ON TO PREDICT INCREASING DISCONTENT AND UNREST UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED IT'S PLANS FOR A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE.

8. COMMENT: SO, WHILE PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ REMAINS IN CONTROL, AND MAY WELL BE CONSOLIDATING IT SOMEWHAT, PRESSURES ARE MOUNTING FOR AT LEAST AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR RETURN TO CIVIL RULE. THE OUTCOME OF THE NOV. 13TH GENERAL STRIKE PROVIDES A HINT THAT RODRIGUEZ IS UNLIKELY TO BE FORCED FROM OFFICE BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND, IN FACT, PROVIDES CIRCUMSTANTIAL

EVIDENCE THAT POLITICAL PRESSURES FOR A RETURN TO CIVIL
RULE MAY NOT BE WIDELY SHARED BY THE WORKING PART OF
THE BODY POLITIC. IT ALSO DEMONSTRATES THAT RODRIGUEZ'
ABILITY TO RESIST THESE PRESSURES IS INTACT. THE FACT
THAT RODRIGUEZ SPENT THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS VISITING QUITO
ARMY UNITS SUGGESTS, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS CONTINUING TO
TRY TO REBUILD HIS SUPPORT THERE. SENIOR MILITARY MEM-
BERS OF RODRIGUEZ' GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO REASSURE THE
PUBLIC THAT THE MILITARY IS UNITED BEHIND RODRIGUEZ, AND
A COMMUNIQUE PUBLISHED NOV. 15TH, SIGNED BY THE COMMANDERS
OF THE THREE FORCES, SAID JUST THAT ONCE AGAIN. STILL,
THE POSSIBILITY OF A COUP ATTEMPT BY ONE OF THEM, OR BY
SOME OTHER MILITARY LEADER, EXISTS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WAGES, POLITICAL STABILITY, GENERAL STRIKES, WORKING CONDITIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975QUITO08388
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750401-1017
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751132/aaaabcny.tel
Line Count: 183
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 QUITO 8298, 75 QUITO 8302, 75 QUITO 8304
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 MAY 2003 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <19 DEC 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE GOE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GENERAL STRIKE
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, ELAB, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006